

Some m-commerce reeks of Big Brother

We are about to be overwhelmed by yet another buzzword: m-commerce.

Just when you thought you had heard enough about on-line shopping, along comes mobile commerce, another concept geared toward getting us to spend money.

Someone took the time to explain the m-commerce concept to me the other day. I'll be able to walk down the street with my Internet-enabled cellphone. As I walk past a Starbucks, my phone will ring. Looking at the built-in Web browser, I'll see a coupon for a free latte.

Proponents of m-commerce believe we will soon see a future where we're all connected to the Internet via a wireless connection all the time. Vendors will be able to pitch their wares anywhere, at any time, based upon where we are.

And yes, they believe we will willingly plug into an Internet in which they will be able to instantly determine where we are, or even track our journeys.

Listening to them, I've come to realize that I don't want wireless access — just plug an Internet implant in my head.

Some of the m-commerce schemes reek of Big Brother silliness. What they ignore is that survey after survey shows that privacy remains the biggest concern of the typical Internet user.

Yet these m-commerce folks envision each of us participating in an exercise where our location can be tracked right down to a square metre.

A giant market for wireless applications is undoubtedly emerging, given the massive growth in the number of Internet-connected wireless devices.

According to one study by U.S. consulting company Frost & Sullivan, the market for mobile phones, pagers and palm computers is expected to grow to \$64.41-billion (U.S.) by 2005 from \$2.98-billion in



DIGITAL SURVIVOR

JIM CARROLL

1999. Many of these new devices will come with built-in Internet access.

There are also many useful applications emerging, ranging from stock trading to banking to e-mail access. Yet at the same time, some of the same old on-line shopping concepts are being proposed for the world of wireless.

I heard one expert talk recently about an application through which we could order groceries through our cellphone. Hello! Why wouldn't we just drive to the store and do it in the real world? At least we could check the quality of the lettuce.

Not only do the ideas seem silly, but I've come to realize that wireless Internet access can be extremely annoying.

Have you ever had lunch with someone who has one of those little pager-like e-mail devices? The next time my lunch partners fumble in their laps, hoping that I don't realize they are reading their e-mail, I'm going to walk out the door. It's insulting, disrespectful and — to be honest — someone could easily misinterpret what you're up to.

♦ ♦ ♦

Jim Carroll is co-author of Light Bulbs to Yottabits: How to Profit by Understanding the Internet of the Future, and can be reached by e-mail at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com